

Subjective Well-Being and Left-Behind Places: The moderating effect of regional digital characteristics

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between individual life satisfaction and different typologies of left-behind areas across the European Union at the NUTS-2 level, while also examining the moderating role of digital characteristics in this relationship. Using a novel dataset of approximately 7,000 individuals collected under the Horizon MOBI-TWIN project, we analyze how living in distinct left-behind contexts, as classified by Velthuis et al. (2023) into six categories ranging from long-term economic prosperity to disconnected and high-poverty regions, shapes subjective well-being. Additionally, we integrate regional digital economy and societal characteristics from EUROSTAT with individual-level digital perceptions from the survey dataset to explore the role of digital connectivity in either amplifying or mitigating the effects of left-behindness on life satisfaction. Empirically, we employ multivariate regression analysis and instrumental variable regression to estimate the effect of left-behindness on well-being, while also examining the role of digital characteristics in this relationship. Our findings will contribute to understanding the spatial determinants of life satisfaction and the extent to which digital inclusion can serve as a buffer against the adverse effects of regional socio-economic decline. These insights have important implications for regional policy and digital development strategies aimed at fostering well-being in structurally disadvantaged and marginalised areas.

Keywords: life satisfaction; left-behindness; regional development; digital characteristics

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